

Sermon Series:

## **GREEN LEAF IN DROUGHT-TIME**

God's sustaining grace in times of trouble



### **Sunday morning service – 04/07/2021**

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**CALL TO WORSHIP:** John 1:1-5; 10-14

- <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*
- <sup>2</sup> *He existed in the beginning with God.*
- <sup>3</sup> *God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.*
- <sup>4</sup> *The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.*
- <sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*
  
- <sup>10</sup> *He came into the very world he created,  
but the world didn't recognize him.*
- <sup>11</sup> *He came to his own people,  
and even they rejected him.*
- <sup>12</sup> *But to all who believed him and accepted him,  
he gave the right to become children of God.*
- <sup>13</sup> *They are reborn—  
not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan,  
but a birth that comes from God.*
  
- <sup>14</sup> *So the Word became human and made his home among us.  
He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.  
And we have seen his glory,  
the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

**SONG: One True God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNRibznQGsY>

## **PASTORAL PRAYER (Bob and Marj Nance)**

### **Psalm 62:1-2**

*My soul finds rest in God alone;*

*my salvation comes from Him.*

*He alone is my rock and salvation;*

*He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

Almighty God, as we meditate on these words, we take comfort from the fact that You, O God, are our rock and salvation, a Rock that cannot be moved and a refuge and fortress that protects and shelters us when times are hard and difficult. And at the moment, things are hard and difficult for many of Your children. Some of those difficulties arise from the COVID virus which has affected their employment or income, others are finding the isolation due to our current lockdown, very distressing, and some are struggling from health situations that we, or our loved ones, are experiencing through the sickness itself, or the separation which prevents us from helping or comforting each other.

Yet, in all this, we can stand firm in the knowledge that our God is an awesome God. He is the One who created all things and who has a plan for His creation and nothing will prevent that plan coming to completion. You O Lord, will bring it to completion because You know all things, You know the end from the beginning. Your eyes are roaming throughout the whole earth and are witnessing how man, at the moment, is thumbing his nose at You, and declaring “where is Your God” and just continuing to carry on doing what is right in their own eyes. But, when Christ returns to rule over the earth, He will judge both sin and the sinner and only those who have put their faith in Jesus, those who are His treasured possession, will know the blessed hope we have in Him of eternal life in His presence.

While thinking of this virus, we give thanks for the steady recovery Michelle and Howard are having. We thank You that Michelle was able to access some medical help to overcome her breathing problems and ask that You continue to strengthen their bodies and restore them to full health and strength soon.

Also, we ask that You will continue to watch over Jill and Colin as their time to depart for Spain draws near. We pray that You will touch the hearts of Your people, to cause them to freely give to support their ministry, and enable them to witness a wonderful harvest of souls for Your kingdom.

While Uganda is in lockdown, Grace is unable to travel and so she cannot be with her family. Be with her, Caleb and Gary, and comfort and sustain them at this difficult time. Be with Caleb as he tries to send forth Your word through the internet, and may many lives be touched through this medium, and many come to salvation through hearing Your Word in this way.

In many countries, Your children are not only affected by the virus, but are being persecuted on a daily basis, even to the point of losing their lives. We pray that You will strengthen them in their faith and may they know Your presence with them in every situation, and may their witness challenge their persecutors, such that they might experience the power of Your saving grace, and give their lives to You.

We thank You for the avenues You have opened for us here at Panania, to support Your work of reaching out to people with the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, both locally and abroad.

One such avenue, the “Samaritans Purse Christmas Boxes”, has provided many opportunities for the local pastors, to not only reach out to children, but also to their parents,

and the fact that lives have been changed as they have responded to Christ's love and the message of salvation, through this ministry, gives us cause to praise and rejoice with the heavenly angels of a soul set free from sin and death.

We pray for the work of our Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) , Karen, Graeme, Lorraine and Dinesh, as they continue to produce a profile of this church and its needs, with the aim of showing a prospective minister how they would fit into this church. As we move along this path, we give thanks for our present pastor, Becky Douglass, who has, under God's guidance, led and nurtured the members of this congregation. We thank You, Lord, for her passion for Your Word, and the desire that we should all grow into Your likeness and become as a light set on a hill to draw people to You.

We pray for those of our church who are unwell or who have had to isolate themselves from our fellowship for fear of catching the virus. We ask that You will comfort each one with Your presence and peace and bring them back soon, when it is safe to do so, so they may join us in praising, worshipping and rejoicing in Your love and care each week.

We pray particularly for Liz Martin as she commences radiation and chemotherapy. Father, please strengthen and sustain her for the weeks ahead and bring complete healing to her body. May Liz and her family know Your presence, peace and courage, and may it be a time when the whole family are drawn closer to You.

We pray also for Margaret Carey, Jeanette Harrington, Becky's dad and step-mum, Karen Warren, Graeme and Jeanette, Ross Pogson, Bill and Brenda and Harry and Betty. Please bring complete healing to their bodies and protect them at this difficult time in their lives.

We pray all these things in the Name of Jesus who taught His disciples saying.

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.  
Amen.*

### **SONG: Trust and Obey**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VoA0Cs8kqI>

### **BIBLE READING**

(Relevant verses are included in the reflection below. If you want to read the whole story, it is found in 2 Kings 18,19)

### **REFLECTION: A Prayer Of Faith (Becky Douglass)**

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/M1FvV54OIIM>

Last Sunday, we looked at Jeremiah 17:7,8, which says:

*Blessed are those who trust in the LORD  
and have made the LORD their hope and confidence.  
They are like trees planted along a riverbank,  
with roots that reach deep into the water.  
Such trees are not bothered by the heat  
or worried by long months of drought.  
Their leaves stay green,  
and they never stop producing fruit.*

We thought about the need to have our roots go down deep into God so that we will know His sustaining presence when we go through difficult times. As we spend time with Him and in reading His Word, it will shape our thinking and our circumstances, though uncertain and difficult, will not destroy us.

God has also given us other ways to connect with Him and stay strong in the face of difficulties and we are going to look at a couple of them in the coming weeks. Today we want to look at prayer. We're going to do this by studying the prayer of one of Judah's kings – Hezekiah – when he faced an impossible situation.

### **The setting**

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, was an unbelievably bad king who turned away from God and actively sought to bring the worship of pagan gods to Judah. However, when his son Hezekiah became king, everything changed. There must have been someone in Hezekiah's life who had remained true to God and that person had a profound influence on Hezekiah because He turned back to God and sought to bring the whole nation back to following God.. The Bible says:

*He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. ... Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the LORD in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the LORD had given Moses. So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did.  
(2 Kings 18:3-7)*

But it was not an easy time to be a king. Assyria was the most powerful nation at that time, and they swept through the region, conquering every nation in their path. Just four years after Hezekiah became king, the Assyrian army marched into the northern kingdom of Israel and after a siege of three years, conquered it and carried all the Israelites away to Assyria. (18:9-12), replacing them with people from other conquered countries. The northern kingdom was utterly destroyed.

A tenuous peace reigned for the next six or seven years until a new king of Assyria, Sennacherib, decided to add Judah to his territory. He marched south, capturing cities as he went. (18:13) Hezekiah tried to appease him by giving him all the gold and silver he had, including stripping the gold from the doors of the temple. (18:14-16) But Sennacherib didn't stop. He laid siege to Jerusalem and tried to frighten the people into surrendering by telling them of the victories he had already won – psychological warfare! (18:17-37)

King Hezekiah knew the situation was impossible, but he continued to trust in God. He sent messengers to Isaiah the prophet, seeking a word from God. Isaiah reassured Hezekiah that they did not need to be afraid because God was already working on their behalf. Hezekiah was encouraged by this, but Sennacherib and his army will still be there! The next day he received the following letter from Sennacherib:

*This message is for King Hezekiah of Judah. "Don't let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria. You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different?" (19:10,11)*

### **The prayer**

What could Hezekiah do? He knew he would be utterly destroyed if he tried to fight Sennacherib. Any other nations in the area who might have come to his aid had already been conquered by the Assyrians. He couldn't bribe Sennacherib to go away – he'd already given him all the silver and gold he had! Hezekiah had come to the end of his resources and power. He did the only thing he could.

*After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the LORD's Temple and spread it out before the LORD. (19:14)*

I can just imagine Hezekiah walking slowly from his palace to the temple next door, his shoulders bowed with the weight of the situation and his face drawn in anxiety and weariness. He went into the temple and laid the letter before God. And then he looked up to heaven and prayed:

*"O LORD, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. Bend down, O LORD, and listen! Open your eyes, O LORD, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God. It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. Now, O LORD our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O LORD, are God." (19:15-19)*

I think this is picture of a man who knows his God. He is simply sharing the situation and their need and then leaves it in God's hands. He doesn't come demanding protection because of all the good things he had done as king. He doesn't come to God with battle plans asking God to bless them. He knows he doesn't have the answer. But he does know that his god will do what is right and best – for the honour of His name, and for the welfare of His people. The battle was God's and God's alone. Hezekiah's role was to place the situation in God's hands and leave it there.

This has prompted me to look at the way I pray. Do I trust God like this? When something goes wrong, I immediately start working out what I think needs to happen to make it right again and then I go to God with all my ideas and plans and ask Him to do what I want Him to do. Too often I don't let Him get a word in edgewise! And I am so disappointed if things don't happen the way I want them to and when I want them to. I think that if I just have more faith, if I pray harder and longer and louder, this will convince God to do the "right" thing – as if He were somehow ignorant of what needs to happen or reluctant to

care for His people! I speak as one who has done this more times that I would like to admit.

But is this faith? It seems to me that faith involves knowing and trusting our God. Our God who is righteous and powerful; gracious and compassionate; all-knowing and infinitely wise. Can't I trust Him to know the best thing to do – for everyone involved? Can't I trust Him to have the power and desire to do what is best? Can't I trust Him to walk with me always and enable me to deal with anything this sinful, broken world can throw at us? Why do I think I need to tell Him what to do?

Maybe we need to learn to pray more like Hezekiah. Maybe as we come to know God more and more, we will be able to come to God and simply lay the problem before Him, admitting the difficulties, how we are feeling about it and how much we need Him. The Psalms are full of this kind of painful, weeping honesty. The Psalms also teach us how to then turn our eyes from the situation and look to our God and remind ourselves of who God is and His care for us. And as our faith grows, we will be able to leave our concerns in His hands and trust Him to know us and our need and take care of us in ways more wonderful than we can imagine.

### **The answer**

Hezekiah certainly saw God at work in amazing ways! Even as he was praying, God was working out their deliverance. And it would be spectacular! God had a plan to not only protect Jerusalem and His own honour, but also punish Sennacherib for His arrogance.

*That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there. One day while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with their swords. They then escaped to the land of Ararat, and another son, Esarhaddon, became the next king of Assyria. (19:35-37)*

Hezekiah and Judah didn't have to do anything! And Judah did more than just survive the siege. God made a promise to them through Isaiah.

*And you who are left in Judah, who have escaped the ravages of the siege,  
will put roots down in your own soil and will grow up and flourish.  
For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem,  
a group of survivors from Mount Zion.  
The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!  
(19:30,31)*

What a victory! Could Hezekiah have even imagined such an outcome? I don't think so. God's victory rescued them from their threat and defended His own reputation – in a way that only He could have done.

In the book, [Green Leaf in Drought-time](#), the story is told of how Arthur and Wilda Matthews were under house arrest and cut off from regular supplies of necessities. They had been encouraged by some at home to claim victory in the situation. They needed to tell God what He needed to do and then believe that He would do it. They prayed feverishly for release, becoming more and more restless and discouraged as they did so. Why was God not answering their prayer? What had they done wrong? But then they began asking themselves if this anxious asking was really pleasing to God. Didn't He know their need? Arthur wrote:

*So we came to see that God wanted us to will with Him to stay put; not to desire to run away as quickly as we could force Him or persuade Him to let us ... it was natural that we should go from there to cry with David, "I delight to do thy will, O my God. (Psalm 40:8).*

It might be expected that having learned this lesson, they would see God's release, but in fact things only got worse and they were to know many more months before first Wilda and then Arthur was released. However, now things were different in their hearts. They were no longer anxious but trusting God to be caring for them even when it was difficult. Their tree – their life and witness - remained green in the drought, no matter how dry it got. And God was at work! Many others around them at that time and down through the years have been blessed and encouraged to pray in faith and delight in God's good will for them.

We are not facing a surrounding army or Communist oppressors. But that doesn't mean that there are not hard things in our lives. Difficulties at work, health issues, the death of loved ones, fears for the future and even COVID lockdowns can all become overwhelming. Dear friends, don't hesitate to take whatever you are facing to God. Lay it out before Him as Hezekiah did. Share your fears and hopes. He loves you and is just waiting for you to unburden your heart to Him. And then, in faith, leave it with Him, not telling Him what needs to happen, but believing that He will do what is best for you. It may not look like anything you could imagine, but God will be with you, and it will be good.

## **PRAYER**

Lord, it is hard for us to let go and let You to work Your will in our lives. I pray that You would reveal Yourself to us in deeper and deeper ways. May our hearts would be full of your love so that we can trust you no matter what the situation is. And may we know that you always want us to come to you with our requests and that we don't have to be afraid to tell you our fears and concerns. But then, Lord, help us to leave them with you and go forward in trust this week. And may we see you at work in ways that we could have never imagined. Amen

## **SONG: Jesus, Strong and Kind**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Y8s-Sz\\_ac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Y8s-Sz_ac)

## **BENEDICTION: 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17**

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,  
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,  
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.  
Amen*